



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **U.S. SENATE RATIFIES AMENDMENTS TO MIGRATORY BIRD TREATIES WITH CANADA AND MEXICO**

The U.S. Senate has approved amendments to migratory bird treaties with Canada and Mexico that will improve the management of birds that migrate between the countries and provide fairness in the regulation of waterfowl harvests to Alaska's indigenous people and Canada's Aboriginal people.

Canada has approved the amendments and Mexico is in the approval process. President Clinton will now exchange instruments of ratification with the two countries.

The Migratory Bird Convention with Canada, signed in 1916, is North America's oldest international wildlife conservation pact. The United States and Mexico signed a similar treaty in 1936. The treaties provide protection for all species of migratory birds in North America except in regulated hunting seasons for game birds.

By barring migratory bird hunting between March 10 and September 1, however, the original treaties did not adequately take into account traditional harvests of migratory birds by northern indigenous people during the spring and summer months. These harvests have gone on for centuries and continued despite the treaty prohibitions. In many cases, the birds are a vital food source for northern indigenous people of Canada and Alaska.

The amendments will allow the United States and Canada to recognize and cooperatively manage these subsistence hunts with native people. Because no new harvests are being established, biologists expect the amendments to have little or no impact on either the number of birds flying south or the abundance of game species. In fact, the amendments should improve management of these birds by creating a partnership with indigenous people who are stewards of some of the most important habitat in the world.

"The amendments are a win-win for native people, migratory birds, and everyone who enjoys birds," Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said. "The amendments not only recognize the centuries-old harvest of migratory birds by native people but also improves the conservation of these birds by including native peoples in the management process

"The amendments also will benefit bird conservation by increasing cooperation and the flow of information between the three countries," he said.

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The amendments to the migratory bird treaties also:

- o Increase information exchanges and data collection among the three countries and Aboriginal and indigenous people, expanding the scientific base for migratory bird management.
- o Update certain parts of the treaties including the species list and outdated protection measures;
- o Provide a forum whereby the countries can work cooperatively to resolve migratory bird problems in a manner consistent with the principles underlying the treaties and, if necessary, design special actions or policies to conserve and protect species of concern.

While the amendments provide for a legal spring and summer harvest for some far northern people, the Canadian and American governments are required to ensure this migratory bird harvest is conducted in accordance with conservation principles. The United States will establish specific harvest regulations for spring and summer seasons in cooperation with local and state cooperative management organizations.

Following ratification, the United States and Canada will engage in regulatory processes to ensure the amendments are properly implemented. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will rely on authority under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 to establish subsistence harvest seasons in Alaska. The public will have ample opportunity to comment on regulations. The Service also will establish cooperative management bodies comprising Alaska Natives and state and Service officials to recommend annual regulations for the hunts.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 67 national fish hatcheries.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.